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OPERATIONAL MANEUVER FROM THE SEA:  
PRINCIPLES OF WAR APPLY

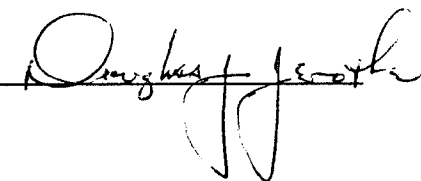
by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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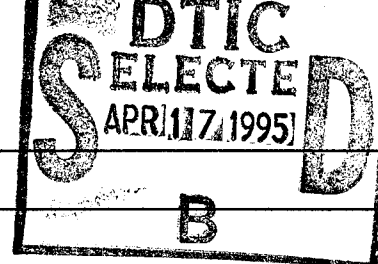
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## ABSTRACT

As the naval service approaches the 21st century with a revised philosophy about warfighting, it will be the combatant commander who is ultimately responsible for shaping the battlespace in this new strategic landscape. Creating the conditions necessary to achieve the military objective will be a driving factor in shaping operations. The principles of war will serve the combatant commander in the planning process of establishing those conditions.

Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS) is clearly a new concept for employing the Navy and Marine Corps team. On the other hand, the basic fundamentals of warfighting are not new; embedded in the tabloids of history is their success in combat. As the naval service embraces the concepts behind OMFTS, combatant commanders should not cast away the principles that have lasted thousands of years. It is the principles of war that provides the architecture for building OMFTS. When applied to the traditional principles, OMFTS will serve to dissipate the fog of war.

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## A NEW FOCUS

The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War has brought about a significant shift in National Security Strategy. The threat of communist expansionism and our Cold War global maritime strategy has given way to a more complex and uncertain strategic landscape. The publication of "... From the Sea" in 1992 and "Forward ... From the Sea" in 1994 has given the Navy and the Marine Corps a new operational focus for the projection of power and influence in response to regional challenges.<sup>1</sup> The naval service will no longer operate under the traditional Mahanian concept whereby fleet battles take place on the open ocean and continental forces operate separately ashore. The Corbettian concept will now guide naval operations. In order to play a greater role in influencing the outcome of land operations, there will be a requirement for the Navy to operate in the littorals. The naval service will now function as a maneuver force from the sea.

### Operational Maneuver From the Sea

*"Now an army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strengths and strikes weaknesses."*<sup>2</sup>

The days of frontal amphibious assaults to shoreline strongholds are coming to an end. Budgetary constraints and downsizing require more efficient and effective warfighting methods. OMFTS is a concept for the projection of a maritime power ashore.<sup>3</sup> It applies land maneuver warfare tenants to a maritime setting. In order to defeat the adversary on the

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<sup>1</sup> US Navy Department, Forward...From the Sea, (Washington: 1994), pg. Forward.

<sup>2</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Trans. Samuel B. Griffith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) pg. 101.

<sup>3</sup> US Marine Corps, Operational Maneuver From the Sea. Draft paper (Washington: 1994) pg. 1.

battlefield or effectively resolve conflicts in a peacetime environment, the Naval Expeditionary Force (NEF) seamlessly combines sea, land and air components as a single maneuver element. OMFTS capitalizes on the cooperative actions of naval forces to strike decisively at enemy vulnerabilities in order to break their cohesion. The integration of surface, subsurface, air, amphibious, and mine warfare components will accomplish this objective.

“Chaos in the littorals”<sup>4</sup> best describes the uncertain and unpredictable characteristics of the new strategic environment. Neither our next opponent nor the next crisis is positively identifiable. As a result, the combatant commander may not have the luxury of time in deliberating his operational plan. Operating within the confines of the littorals will require the combatant commander to make critical and time sensitive decisions during operations. Integrating the principles of war during OMFTS will give the combatant commander a framework for making those quick decisions.

If the naval service is to embrace OMFTS as the doctrine for the 21st century, it is imperative that the combatant commander not toss the basics aside. The principles of war are the basic fundamentals of warfighting. As naval doctrine evolves, its authors consistently try to rework and reword the principles of war in an effort to fit this new doctrine. When developing OMFTS, let there be no doubt that when properly applying the traditional principles of war to Operational Maneuver from the Sea, it will dissipate the fog of war. It will bring a foundation of organization to an otherwise “chaotic” environment.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. . 2. A phrase used to characterize rapid actions of naval forces operating in a confined, shallow water environment.

## **Principles of War**

Theorists, such as Sun Tzu, brought clarity to the rational basis for the planning and conduct of military operations by summarizing the necessary conditions needed to defeat an adversary.<sup>5</sup> Today we recognize these conditions as the traditional nine principles of war. When applied to the concept of OMFTS, the principles of war serve the combatant commander by establishing the conditions necessary to achieve military objectives. While their relevance has withstood the test of time going back over 2000 years, there remains no doubt of the continued importance of the principles of war today. They permeate doctrinal publications such as FMFM 1 *Warfighting*, FM 100-5 *Operations*, and Joint Pub 3-0 *Joint Operations*. Most recently, the Navy is formally embracing the principles of war with the publication Naval Doctrine Publication 1, *Naval Warfare*.<sup>6</sup>

Although the services widely accept the principles of war, caution is necessary when applying them as a check list for success. C.R. Brown wrote about the dangers of adhering inflexibly to them as a set of commandments. He noted that you win a war by the ability to think through situations and not by a book of rules.<sup>7</sup> It is imperative not to look upon the principles of war as ingredients guaranteeing success but rather the architecture within a warfighting system.

### **The Application of OMFTS to the Principles of War**

The task of applying the concept of OMFTS to the principles of war was visible in our recent combat experience in Operation Desert Storm. The success achieved during

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<sup>5</sup> Sun Tzu, Back Cover.

<sup>6</sup> US Navy Department, NDP 1 NAVAL WARFARE (Washington: 1994), pp. 43-47.

<sup>7</sup> C.R. Brown, "The Principles of War," United States Naval Proceedings, June 1949, pg. 622.

Operation Desert Storm validated the use of the nine principles of war. Desert Storm also demonstrated that the key tenants of OMFTS are achievable by integrating all aspects of air, land and sea warfare into a flexible and overwhelming combat force. Through an application of OMFTS to the nine principles of war, with frequent references to Operation Desert Storm, the author will to build a foundation of understanding on how our evolving doctrine can effectively support the operational commander in the new strategic environment.

**Objective: Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective.**

*"It is the connecting link which, alone can impart coherence to war; for fighting just for the sake of fighting becomes insensate slaughter."*<sup>8</sup>

The objective of war is its most overarching principle. The clarity of the objective will determine the success or failure of the operation. When applying OMFTS, the combatant commander will focus on attainment of the strategic objective.<sup>9</sup> This focus is essential in directing subordinate commanders toward achievable operational objectives. It is the ultimate responsibility of the combatant commander, therefore, to translate military objectives into the national goals.

Operation Desert Storm is a classic example of using this principle of objective. Commander in Chief of Central Command's (CINCCENT) published objectives for the operations were clear -- Attack Iraqi political-military leadership and command and control(C2); gain and maintain air superiority; sever Iraqi supply lines; destroy known

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 624.

<sup>9</sup> OMFTS (Draft), pg. 5.

NBC capabilities; destroy the Republican Guard; and liberate Kuwait.<sup>10</sup> CINCCENT's focus on strategic theater goals provided the guiding structure for meshing land, air and sea component commander objectives. Achievement of National objectives was quick and decisive as a result of that focus.

**Offensive: Seize and exploit the initiative.**

*"Your aim must be to take All-Under-Heaven intact. Thus your troops are not worn out and your gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy."<sup>11</sup>*

On 24 February 1991, the Desert Storm ground war began. The coalition forces gained the initiative and maintained it until the war was over a mere 100 hours later. After six months of planning, preparation, training and exercises, the Coalition brought the war to the Iraqis at the time and place of its choosing. The momentum of the coalition force was such that it denied the Iraqi army control of the battle.

Operational Maneuver From the Sea can produce the same devastating results. As the "first round in the breach," the combatant commander employs the Naval Expeditionary Force (NEF) as the pointed end of the spear to open the gate for follow-on forces. This seamless employment of surface, subsurface, aviation and amphibious combatants provides an array of sustainable combat power producing a tempo of operations that keeps the adversary defensive and reactive. Maintaining the initiative, the combatant commander denies the adversary freedom of action while exploiting his own.

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<sup>10</sup> US Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, Final Report to Congress (Washington: 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, Pg. 79.



**Mass: Mass the effects of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time.**

*"The best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, and then at the decisive point...there is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of keeping one's forces concentrated."*<sup>12</sup>

The application of mass conjures up thoughts of overwhelming the adversary by concentrating superior number of troops. As demonstrated in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the massing of over 500,000 coalition forces was an effort that succeeded in part because of a cooperative adversary.<sup>13</sup>

In the future, the combatant commander may not have a cooperative adversary or the luxury of time in which to mass such an impressive concentrated force.

Downsizing of the military force and an increase in the number of global crises will deny the combatant commander the ability to enter a conflict with a quantitative advantage.

Synchronizing the total affects of technologically advanced weaponry, such as Tomahawk land attack missiles (TLAM), precision guided munitions (PGM), advanced reconnaissance and surveillance, and space systems will assure the commander a qualitative edge over his opponent. Under OMFTS, he exploits the revolution in military technology as a force multiplier to mass combat power.

**Security: Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.**

Today, the combatant commander faces the challenge of responding to a conflict by applying a sufficiently powerful force; getting the job done; and getting out with

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pg. 204.

<sup>13</sup> Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, pg. 114.

minimum casualties on both sides. Security contributes to overcoming this challenge. Achievement of security will allow the combatant commander freedom of action by guarding against enemy influence and interference.

It is essential that the combatant commander protect the allocated forces with which he operates. OMFTS can insure security and protection for these forces in a variety of ways. Consider the following 2 examples:

Example 1. The combatant commander used the sea to protect his forces from early visual detection through over the horizon operations. Exploiting this capability supports covert advanced force operations for intelligence and reconnaissance.

Example 2. OMFTS supported the CINCCENT operations plan in Operation Desert Storm by creating a deception. The amphibious feint conducted along the Kuwaiti coastline, simultaneously to land operations, provided security from detection for the "Hail Mary" operation in Iraq.

OMFTS will achieve protection of the forces by allowing freedom of action and provide the ability to project maritime power at decisive points.<sup>14</sup>

**Economy of Force: Employ all combat power available in the most effective way possible; allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.**

*"When the time for action comes, the first requirement should be that all parts must act: even the least appropriate task will occupy some of the enemy forces and reduce his overall strength..."<sup>15</sup>*

The NEF commander can maintain economy of force within a battlespace by shifting priorities of efforts as the operation unfolds. The rapid shifting of maritime forces to support changes in main efforts produces a tempo that denies enemy control of a

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<sup>14</sup> OMFTS (Draft), pg. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, pg. 213.

situation. This tempo was evident in Desert Storm. CINCCENT seamlessly shifted the priority of effort from air operations to the ground war and quickly achieved the military objectives.

Under OMFTS, the combatant commander's main effort may initially go to antisurface or antiair operations in order to achieve security within the theater of operations. All other component commanders would support the main effort. The priority of effort can rapidly shift to the projection of amphibious forces ashore. With the achievement of battlespace dominance, all other component warfare commanders would also shift support towards the new main effort. OMFTS provides the combatant commander the flexibility to integrate each of his assets to economize his combat power while simultaneously maximizing their effects.

**Maneuver: Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the feasible application of combat power.**

*"Now war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces."<sup>16</sup>*

Traditionally, the principle of maneuver has come to represent the application of combat power in the dimensions of time and space. Joint publication 3-0 defines it as the application of combat power faster than the adversary can react to gain positional advantage. Ultimately, the combatant commander uses maneuver to attack the adversary's center of gravity. If the center of gravity is too strong initially, maneuver and

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<sup>16</sup> Sun Tzu, pg. 106.

fire will allow attacks on critical vulnerabilities that should lead to the destruction of the center of gravity.

During Desert Storm, the Republican Guard was the center of gravity in the KTO and rendering them ineffective would achieve the military objective of liberating Kuwait.<sup>17</sup> Applying the principle of maneuver, the coalition forces used a series of simultaneous operations throughout the KTO. They attacked Iraqi vulnerabilities -- rather than in head on attacks -- in order to accomplish this task. The Coalition attacked enemy vulnerabilities such as command, control and communications networks (C3), air support capabilities, and logistical support capabilities. These became decisive points for the rousting of Iraqi forces. Simultaneously, the Coalition was concentrating its forces to the west in preparation for delivering a final blow; the "Hail Mary."

OMFTS not only uses land and air as a medium for maneuver, but as the title suggests, the sea as well. Sea-based forces have the unique ability to create events that can paralyze an adversary through the decisive application of power.<sup>18</sup> The use of the sea as an area for maneuver enables the NEF to expand the battlespace, forcing the adversary to protect a greater region. In so doing, the combatant commander creates weaknesses or gaps in the adversary's defenses while exploiting friendly strengths.

**Unity of Command: Ensure unity of effort for every objective under one responsible commander.**

*"It is the seamless and continued integration of all assets against a single focus that will provide the critical strategic and operational advantage of OMFTS."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, pg. 94.

<sup>18</sup> OMFTS (Draft), pg. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 6.

It is the intent of a single commander that can best achieve and maintain a single focus. Operation Desert Storm is a case study that violated this principle due to political and cultural differences among coalition partners. Although the combined forces sacrificed command unity, the coalition achieved unity of effort through the coordination, communication and intelligence center (C3IC). Unity of command did, however, exist within the Joint US forces through CINCCENT.<sup>20</sup> Component commanders reported directly to CINCCENT who, in turn, reported to the Secretary of Defense through the CJCS.

A cornerstone of OMFTS is the ability for the operational commander to maintain unity of purpose among his maritime force directed at a common objective. His success in conveying intent through centralized planning will culminate in a well orchestrated and synchronized, decentralized execution of tasks by subordinate commanders. The combatant commander is the single person responsible for keeping the objective in focus throughout the fog of war.

**Simplicity: Avoid unnecessary complexity in preparing, planning and conducting military operations.**

*"Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult."*<sup>21</sup>

The combatant commander demonstrates the art of simplicity in warfare by his ability to convey intent in clear and concise terms. As previously discussed in the principle of objective paragraph, CINCCENT's Operation order for the Gulf War is a

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<sup>20</sup> Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, pg. 58.

<sup>21</sup> Clausewitz, pg. 119.

classic example of simplicity as well. While there was the equivalent of 17 divisions, 1736 combat aircraft and the largest amphibious force assembled since the Korean War,<sup>22</sup> CINCCENT was able to translate the complexities and confusions associated with this operational war plan into simple and understandable tactical guidance.

Operational Maneuver From the Sea supports simplicity by allowing the combatant commander to combine each of his assets into a relatively small and cohesive package, then deliver that package with overwhelming total force. By conducting maritime power projection as a single operation -- as opposed to separate related operations -- the combatant commander can publish clear and concise orders more easily understood by all force echelons.

**Surprise: Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.**

*"Surprise therefore becomes the means to gain superiority,...on a grand scale, it confuses the enemy and lowers his moral."*<sup>23</sup>

There is no better illustration of surprise than that which occurred during the 100 hour ground campaign. Iraqi forces fixated on the amphibious feint along the coast and Coalition attacks along the southern Kuwait border. Simultaneously, the "Hail Mary" operation arrived unexpectedly from the West, severing Iraqi lines of communications and isolating the elite Republican Guard.

The achievement of surprise is possible through many aspects of warfare. OMFTS capitalizes on the swift, overwhelming tempo of operations to catch the adversary off

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<sup>22</sup> Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, pg. 114.

<sup>23</sup> Clausewitz, pg. 198.

balance.<sup>24</sup> By initiating operations from over-the-horizon, the combatant commander enhances his operational security while deceiving the enemy with the direction of the attack. Additionally, stand-off weaponry -- such as TLAM -- gives the combatant commander a significant increase in the "scope" of surprise.<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The dissolution of the Cold War maritime strategy and the final chapter of amphibious assaults to shoreline stronghold creates the necessity for more effective and efficient naval operations. OMFTS is a warfighting concept that will provide a basis from which a combatant commander can operate confidently in an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability. However, he must not disregard the premise from around which OMFTS was structured. The traditional principles of war represent basic fundamentals of warfighting. Their historic and proven relevance provides the foundation of organization to an otherwise chaotic environment. The substance of this paper establishes a correlation between the principles behind OMFTS and the traditional principles of war. The author has simplified that correlation in the following illustration:

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<sup>24</sup> OMFTS (Draft), pg. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Richard E. Simpkin, Race to the Swift, (Washington: Brassey's Defense Publishers Ltd., 1985), pg. 179.

Traditional Principles	OMFTS Principles <sup>26</sup>
Objective	* Focus on strategic objective
Offensive	* Keys on advanced force operations * Integration of all assets * Generates momentum * Overwhelming tempo
Mass	* Integration of all assets * Applies strength against weakness * Generates momentum
Security Operations	* Keys on advanced force * Relies on intelligence
Economy of Force	* Integration of all assets
Maneuver	* Emphasizes flexibility * Treats sea as maneuver space
Unity of Effort	* Integrates all assets
Surprise	* Emphasizes flexibility * Overwhelming tempo
Simplicity	* Simplicity

Today, the combatant commander faces a paradox: He must enter future conflicts with dwindling military resources. In doing so, he must choose and effect contemporary methods of warfare that are rooted in tested and timeless principles. OMFTS is a unique approach to naval expeditionary warfare whose strengths are supported by traditional operational tenants. Armed with OMFTS and without abandoning the traditional principles of war, today's combatant commander can focus clearly on the objective by using them as integrated tools of victory.

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<sup>26</sup> OMFTS (Draft), pp. 5-6.



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